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For Immediate Release:  
June 11, 2009

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**Middlesex County Retired Electrician Volunteers at Healthcare Center**

**Fords (Woodbridge Township) resident John Gonyo** has always enjoyed volunteering, for him it is a desire from within to help others.

His wife jokingly says "if he added all the hours of his volunteer work he would be a millionaire." Gonyo responds "that he has a billion dollars worth of memories."

It is because of these memories that Gonyo is so dedicated to serving the residents of the **Roosevelt Care Center in Edison, NJ.**

As a Volunteer Advocate, Gonyo acts on behalf of Elder Ombudsman Debra Branch, whose office investigates allegations of abuse or neglect in the state's 1,155 assisted living facilities, nursing homes and other adult long-term care facilities.

Gonyo spent most of your career as an electrician. When he retired in 1993 he was International UAW Apprentice Chairman for General Motors plant in Linden.

Volunteer Advocates visit elder residents regularly and keep an eye on quality of care issues, resolve problems and provide companionship for elderly residents.

Gonyo visits the facility several hours a week, visiting and responding to the needs of all six floors of residents and he knows almost all of them.

Gonyo first learned about the advocate program through AARP, and decided to get involved; as a senior citizen himself, he wanted to learn and be active in advocating for nursing home residents.

As Gonyo walks through the residence halls, the benefits of his visits are obvious. The staff clearly respects him and works hard to make sure the center is in tip-top shape, which makes Gonyo's job easier, he noted.

As he looks into the bedrooms of the residents checking to see if they are comfortable and happy, their faces light up; he has a joke and a smile for all of them.

Through his jovial approach with the residents, he has been able to gain their trust and feel comfortable, so that airing any complaints and problems won't come with apprehension. The residents know they can rely on him to quickly address and resolve small issues.

If the residents have no complaints, Gonyo provides them company. Some of them have no visitors, but they all know they have Gonyo to talk to.

For him the satisfaction of volunteering comes from knowing he helped someone in need. Gonyo noted that it is all worthwhile for him if in a days work he can help just one person, making their life better.

Gonyo also volunteers at the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City as a docent, is a State Health Insurance Assistance Program counselor and provides assistance to the Woodbridge Township Department of Aging.

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*The success of the Volunteer Advocate Program is predicated on the dedication and devotion of citizens in New Jersey who willingly give back to their communities, and their ability to effectively resolve issues on behalf of the population we serve. Volunteers must complete a 32 hour training program to become a certified Ombudsman Advocate.*

*If you are interested in becoming a volunteer advocate, please contact Joann Cancel at 609-943-4022 or via email at [joann.cancel@advocate.state.nj.us](mailto:joann.cancel@advocate.state.nj.us).*